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SUBJECT: CAIRO SPEECH FOLLOW UP: CONSULTATIVE PROCESS FOR MUSLIM  
ENGAGEMENT

REF: A) STATE 71325 B) DUSHANBE 724 C) DUSHANBE 831

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¶1. Summary: To share President Obama's vision of partnership and opportunity here in Tajikistan, we will have to overcome the country's extreme poverty and isolation. While urban youth and educated elites were generally receptive to his June 4 speech, they represent a small minority of Tajiks. Tajik imams from more isolated areas who had traveled to the United States on an International Visitor program in May, refused to come to the embassy to watch the speech, even though they professed amazement at the freedom to worship they encountered in the United States. Youth in remote areas are growing up unconnected to the outside world, some in zones of simmering conflict between the government and shadowy opposition forces. Communicating our values to Tajiks, who do not have reliable electricity, much less Internet access or television, will require increased and sustained funding for State Department exchanges that bring people together, and especially English language programs for disadvantaged youth. The introduction of a Peace Corps program in Tajikistan, matching the programs which have been present for many years in neighboring Central Asian states, would also significant boost people-to-people contacts in Tajikistan. End summary.

¶2. The embassy initiated the consultative process on President Obama's outreach to the Muslim world by inviting an audience of 40 Tajiks to the embassy to view the President's speech live on June 4, then discussed first impressions (Ref b). Younger audience members and those who had spent time in the United States said it was "a first step" that should be matched by a corresponding gesture from the Muslim side. Audience members over 40 were skeptical and said that President Obama was keeping the same anti-Muslim, pro-Israel policies as President Bush.

¶3. In the weeks following, embassy staff translated the speech into Tajik and distributed DVD and print copies in Russian and Tajik to media and academic contacts. State officers and exchange participants discussed the speech during outreach events with Tajikistan's Muslims, which account for 97% of the population.

-- An American Fulbright scholar led discussions in prayer centers in the Ismaili Muslim community of Khorog to discuss Muslim relations with the West. She distributed copies of the speech in Tajik, Russian, and English to attendees at the Friday prayer services and engaged the attendees in debates about how

to get beyond prejudices that distort the true beliefs of various faiths.

-- The Information Resource Officer for South and Central Asia led a Web chat about the speech with youth tuned in from widely scattered regions of the country - Khujand, Isfara, Khatlon, Qurghon-Teppa, and Kulyab. He led a separate discussion with university students and faculty at Qurghon-Teppa State University. Participants said Obama was the first U.S. President to speak truthfully about relations between Muslims and the West and it was time for this kind of gesture to Muslims worldwide. They said development of deeper understanding would not be easy, but the speech was a crucial first step. The debate encompassed the sources of terrorism, the world economic crisis, and life and study in the U.S.

-- American and Tajik counselors handed out 400 copies of the speech to participants at 13 USG-sponsored English language camps: six Access Microscholarship; four Youth Enrichment Program; one Global Connections and Exchanges; One American Corner; one Volunteer Service Organization camp for USG alumni. Twenty merit English teachers selected for a special mentoring program took copies of the speech for their school districts.

14. We will continue disseminating the speech and IIP publications like "Obama in His Own Words" in high schools, universities, American Corners, and NGOs; hosting or sponsoring debates to engage Muslims at universities, American Corners, and NGOs; hosting "political plov" meetings with politically active citizens to discuss issues affecting their communities; host Web chats for USG-funded and other active Internet nodes.

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#### Scaling up Existing Programs and New Ideas

15. To share the President's vision of partnership and opportunity more broadly, we will have to overcome Tajikistan's extreme poverty and isolation. Only a small economic and political elite can depend on reliable electricity year round, so we will have to communicate our message through low-tech, people-to-people contact. The more we can do to bring Tajiks to the United States, or Americans to Tajikistan, the better.

16. The State Department has a wide variety of effective programs that need sustained funding. A recent visit by Tajik imams to the United States (Ref b) showed that some Tajik religious leaders did not even know that Muslims live in the United States. Even though they were impressed by the level of religious freedom in the United States, these same imams later refused to come to the embassy to view Obama's speech. This is our baseline as we try to help Tajik religious leaders understand our values. A second International Visitor program for imams will take place in May 2010. American Islamic leaders could also share their experiences in visits to Tajikistan, through "Citizen Dialogues" or IIP Speaker programs. They could talk about Muslim life and religious freedom in America at universities, American Corners, and madrassas in Dushanbe, Khujand, and other cities.

17. One program that should be expanded and connected to follow-up programs is the Youth Enrichment Program (YEP) summer

camps to communicate American values directly to marginalized youth. The first four YEP camps started in Tajikistan in 2008 and were hugely popular – in the conservative Isfara district, 2,600 families applied for 100 spaces. This summer, in addition to the four YEP camps in Isfara and in the former stronghold of the Islamist opposition in the Rasht Valley, other USG partners organized nine more near Dushanbe. The Rasht camps were located across a mountain pass from an area where government forces are currently battling militants. The camps' junior high age participants had no sense of geography, had never met an American, and many had never celebrated their own birthdays. They played T-ball for the first time at the camp – with the rule that the girls HAD to bat or their team would forfeit the game.

#### English Language the Key to Communicating Our Message

18. Such children are at risk of being recruited for any future conflicts, growing up completely shut off from the outside world. A week-long camp ultimately is unlikely to change any hearts or minds. If we are serious about communicating with the Muslim world, we must invest in English language training. The YEP camps could be formally linked to English language programs, like the two-year after-school Access Microscholarships. Besides language skills, English courses pass along our values and basic education in social sciences and geography. This requires more funding for the Access program, more English Language Officers at embassies, more contract English Language Specialists and English Language Fellows who train local teachers.

19. Finally, a Peace Corps program in Tajikistan would be a major addition to our outreach efforts. It would place dynamic, self-reliant Americans into daily contact with Tajiks in rural and urban areas, improving the English skills of Tajiks and the Farsi skills of Americans. Peace Corps operates in the other post-Soviet Central Asian states, but did not come to Tajikistan in the 1990s due to the civil war here, and later did not come because of financial constraints. The Peace Corps belongs in Tajikistan, and would give a strong push to our efforts to change attitudes toward the United States.

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